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AUTHOR	Logan, Gerald E.
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ABSTRACT

Each self-teaching unit is designed to teach a specific concept or skill. A unit consists of: (1) a stated performance or behavioral objective, (2) activities to enable the student to achieve the objective, and (3) a test to determine whether or not he has succeeded. This booklet begins with a description of the performance objective, and several sample objectives are presented. Section 2 contains suggestions on the selection and presentation of learning activities. In section 3, suggestions are made concerning ways in which self-teaching units can be used. Part 4 is devoted to the construction of a self-teaching unit. A self-instructional lesson is presented as a sample, and the booklet concludes with recommendations concerning the teacher's choice of learning medium and effective evaluation procedures. (PMP)

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PREPARING AND USING SELF-TEACHING UNITS FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Gerald E. Logan
Live Oak High School
Morgan Hill, California

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics
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PREPARING AND USING SELF-TEACHING UNITS

FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Introduction

Self-teaching units appear under a variety of names, the most common of which are Unipacs and LAPS (Learning Activity Packets). Each unit is designed to teach a specific concept or skill. The unit may introduce the topic to the student, or it may be used for remedial or review purposes. A typical foreign language unit, for example, might focus on the conjugation of irregular French verbs.

Each unit consists of (1) a stated performance or behavioral objective, (2) activities to enable the student to achieve the objective, and (3) a test to determine whether or not he has succeeded. Some packets contain additional components, e.g., a pre-test to determine prior knowledge (which might indicate eliminating part or all of the unit), supplementary activities for the more motivated student and the slow learner, self-tests to allow the student to measure his own progress, and a teacher-controlled final evaluation.

The Performance Objective

A performance objective states what the student is expected to do after completing the activities in the unit.

Learning will be more efficient and rewarding if this goal is stated specifically at the beginning of the unit. Is the student expected to be able to answer questions? Orally? In writing? In English? In Spanish? Of what structural difficulty? Using what vocabulary? Is the student expected to substitute the present perfect tense for the present tense, to translate from English into German, to fill in blanks with past participles, or all of these? The objectives should be stated in exactly these terms. Expressions such as "know," "study," "understand,"

"memorize," "listen," "be familiar with," etc., should be avoided because they are not specific enough. Unless they are carefully qualified, they do not tell the student what activity he is to perform.

A good performance objective indicates all of the following:

(1) The precise behavior expected of the student

Say in Spanish
Write in French
Translate into written English

(2) The conditions under which the student will demonstrate this behavior

When you hear the English equivalents
When dictated in French
When you read the questions in Russian

(3) The level of mastery the student is expected to achieve

Without error
With no more than five errors
So that a native Frenchman could understand

The following sample performance objective meets all of these criteria:

> The student will be able to write in French without error the 50 vocabulary words introduced in this unit when they are dictated by the teacher in French.

Here the phrase "without error" indicates the level of mastery demanded by the instructor. The conditions under which the student's proficiency will be tested are clearly stated. The wording of the objective also reveals the specific behavior expected of him. Note that if the final word in the sample objective were changed from "French" to "English," or if the verb "write" were changed to "say," the student would have to be prepared to demonstrate a different behavior. The instructor would then alter or replace some of the learning activities in the unit. A vague or poorly phrased performance objective (e.g., the student will learn the 50 vocabulary words introduced in this unit) does not define the expected behavior precisely enough to be useful to either the student or the teacher.

Several additional sample performance objectives follow. Note that they all contain a precise target behavior, describe testing conditions, and cite a level of mastery.

The student must be able to say and write in Spanish the 30 irregular verbs in this unit when given the English equivalents. Acceptable performance: 27 correct with no spelling or serious pronunciation errors.

The student must be able to answer orally in grammatically correct French the 20 questions at the end of this unit. The questions will be asked orally, and the student may not refer to written materials.

The student must be able to answer orally in German any questions asked orally in German about the newspaper article in this unit. If the teacher judges that nine out of ten answers would be understood by a native German, performance is acceptable.

The student must be able to write during one class period a 100- to 200-word précis in French of the essay in this unit. The student may look at the essay while writing the précis. There may be no more than five spelling and grammatical errors per 100 words.

Learning Activities

The second section of the self-teaching unit contains materials selected to enable the student to achieve the stated behavioral objectives. The requisite information may be printed in the packet; recorded on tapes, cassettes, films, filmstrips, or slides which accompany the unit; or contained in books, magazines, or other printed or audiovisual materials not included with the packet. Of course, any printed or audiovisual materials to which the student is referred must be readily accessible in the classroom, learning resource center, or laboratory. The packet must contain clear directions for using and mastering the material in such a way as to facilitate the desired final behavior. For example, if the packet refers the student to a specific tape, its location, use, and purpose within the context of the final performance objective should be indicated.

The teacher should include in the learning activities section of the unit all the instructions, hints, directions, learning devices, answers to anticipated questions, drills, and other guidance which would be employed if the students were in front of him in a conventional classroom. Failure to clarify instructions for carrying out the activities and finding the necessary materials will negate the purpose of the self-teaching unit:

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the teacher will find himself surrounded by confused students whom he will have to teach directly after all.

Instructions for evaluating the degree of attainment of the objectives are given at the end of a self-teaching unit, and/or at the end of component parts if the unit is long:

> When you can perform the activities as stated in the objectives on page 1, report to the teacher for evaluation.
>
> When you have completed all the activities in this section as instructed, do the self-test on page 15. Check your answers with the key (obtainable from the teacher). If you have 90 percent or better, report to the teacher for final testing. If you do not have 90 percent, review (re-do) those sections in which you made errors.
>
> Report now to one of the student aides for preliminary evaluation. You will be given further instructions depending on your performance.

Use of Self-Teaching Units

Are self-teaching units worth the effort of preparing them? How can they be employed to warrant the time and energy devoted to their construction?

Such units provide students with remedial work in specific areas. In a cumulative skill subject such as a foreign language, taught in a class which is expected to progress at a fairly uniform rate, failure is almost assured for the students who do not master certain elements upon which future progress depends. If testing on a particular topic or unit shows that the majority of the class have learned the material well, the teacher is inclined to progress to the next stage, even though there are some students who are not really ready.

If self-teaching units are prepared for each basic unit or topic, they can be assigned immediately after testing to those students who need more work on the topic. Assignment is managed most commonly in two ways:

(1) The self-teaching units can be assigned for completion outside of class time, either at school or at home. Students needing this additional work are usually those who tend to neglect their studies, so some sort of motivation is necessary. Raising the student's grade can often provide such motivation. It should not be difficult to justify the improved grade if the student, on his own time, has finally mastered the material.

(2) Students can work on self-teaching units of a remedial nature (extensive, basic drill work) in class while other students are working on supplementary or enrichment materials. Such work can be scheduled regularly during several class periods per month, or for one or two periods following every test, or more frequently--even daily--for part of the class period.

Of course, remedial or review work need not be limited to the topic currently under study. Such units can be assigned to students whenever the need is evident.

Self-teaching units can be used for students at the other end of the spectrum--those who have mastered a particular topic more quickly than the majority of the class. There is little difficulty in managing this situation. Such students can work on supplementary or enrichment activities of either a linguistic or cultural nature while the teacher continues working with the rest of the class.

Self-teaching units are commonly used in individualized programs. One of the major purposes of individualized instruction is to release the teacher from lock-step teaching so that he or she can attend to individual and small group needs. The key to this freedom lies in providing students with self-teaching materials so that they can operate independently part of the time. But mere release of the teacher is just the beginning. Self-teaching units of various types make possible other dimensions of individualization which are held in high regard by those who believe that education should be more personalized and learner-centered than standardized and subject-oriented.

Students can progress at their own rate, proceeding from unit to unit as they master each one. The teacher or aides are available for evaluation when each student is ready. The student is neither rushed into a test before mastering the material nor held back by pacing set for an entire class.

As a variety of units are created or acquired, "courses" with different objectives (speaking, reading, career education, etc.) can be offered to students simultaneously in one classroom. Such units allow for "ungraded" learning centers or classes. Ungraded means that students are not assigned to classes and periods by their proficiency in the foreign language. A class of 30 may contain a mixture of students in the first, second, third and fourth year or beyond. Ungraded classrooms are advantageous to small departments which have insufficient enrollment to allow separate classes at each level. Such grouping also benefits programs which use advanced students as aides and tutors for beginners.

Learning packets with skeletal structure drills and activities can form the basis for "total individualization" courses. The content, vocabulary, and structural sequence (within some limits) of these courses can be tailored to the rate of learning and special interests of the individual student. For example, a unit might explain how a student says he is doing something or wants something in the foreign language. The student is asked to select 20 important verbs from an area of personal or professional interest, such as science, home economics, ecology, etc. The structure is practiced with these verbs instead of with teacher-selected verbs.

Because of their very explicit objectives, teaching strategy, and evaluation procedures, self-teaching units already available can serve as excellent guides and lesson plans for novice teachers, student teachers, and education students in methods courses. The units can also guide paraprofessionals and volunteer instructional aides in their work with foreign language students. A well-constructed sequence of self-teaching units will provide consistency of teaching, regardless of the abilities of the instructor.

Construction of Self-Teaching Units

Although widespread use of self-teaching materials will undoubtedly await the appearance of commercial learning systems and texts based on this concept, most teachers themselves are quite capable of preparing self-teaching units. Furthermore, commercial materials will never answer all the needs of individual teachers and students. These units may be complete learning packets or very brief guides. The actual materials used may be standard texts, tapes, visuals, etc. Any such guide should contain the performance objectives and the learning strategy, the latter consisting mainly of directions to the students for using the standard textbook in an independent learning situation. Directions for evaluation should also be included.

The structure and content of self-instructional materials, whether used for remedial purposes, enrichment, or as the basis for regular or individualized courses and programs, can be extremely varied. Units may take the form of such quasi drills as puzzles, songs, skits, tongue-twisters, poems, games, or the retelling of stories. A unit may be built around a film sound track or an article in a periodical. Teachers have prepared units focusing on structure, vocabulary, idioms, phonology, reading and listening comprehension, and conversation and writing techniques. Culture, literature, or career education may be the subject of a unit, or it may deal with science, philosophy, social studies, fine arts, medicine, etc.

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Live Oak High School in Morgan Hill, California, has developed a checklist for teachers to use in creating complete self-teaching units. This guide is directed to the student but designed so that the teacher won't forget to include any of the essential elements of the unit. The checklist consists of six sections:

A. What You Will Be Able to Do When You Have Completed This Unit

B. The Way a Native (German, Frenchman, etc.) Says or Does It

C. The Way for You to Get There

D. How Does a Native Speaker Put It Together or Feel About It?

E. You Put It Together

F. How Well Can You Do It Now?

The teacher constructing the unit begins with section A, which consists of the performance objective(s). However, if the unit is to consist of several objectives, it is best to divide it into sections, each containing its own objective and its own parts B, C, D, E, and F.

Part B contains or refers to the basic material which the student is to learn or work with or which is to serve as his model. It might contain vocabulary to be learned; words to be pronounced; a story to be read aloud and discussed; cultural information in text, pictorial, recorded, or film form; or sentences to be learned as illustrations of certain structural problems.

Part C consists of specific instructions for finding any materials not included (texts, pages, tapes), an indication of how they are to be used, (memorize, repeat until fluent, make a vocabulary list of all new words), and hints for making the learning easier or more effective.

Part D is composed of reference materials, e.g., grammar analyses, notes and footnotes to a text or film, psychological analyses of cultural phenomena, linguistic analyses, etc.

Part E, the "work" section, contains drills and practice materials.

Part F contains the evaluation instruments and/or instructions.

As an example, a short self-teaching unit on structure from the Live Oak German program is given below. This unit is designed for the ninth day of instruction in an individualized first-level German course. (The entire first-level course consists of 160 such units, dealing with structure, culture, phonology, reading and listening comprehension, and conversation practice.

DEUTSCH: KERNSTUFE
Lesson 9

A. WHAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO DO WHEN YOU HAVE COMPLETED LESSON 9

Say the English equivalent of the seven German infinitive phrases in section B; say and write the German versions of the six English infinitive phrases given in Section E when given the English; and combine the German elements (left-hand column) in section E into German sentences (right-hand column)--both orally and written, without error.

B. HOW DOES A GERMAN SAY AND WRITE IT?

When we express an idea in infinitive form in German, we find the infinitive of the verb (see Lesson 2 if you have forgotten what an infinitive is) at the end of the phrase, not at the beginning as in English.

English	German
to walk	gehen
to walk alone	allein gehen
to walk alone now and then	ab und zu allein gehen

What are the English equivalents of the following German infinitive expressions?

1.	in Deutschland wohnen	to live in Germany
2.	eine Familie haben	to have a family
3.	die Leute kennen	to know the people
4.	Gisela Schmidt heissen	to be named Gisela S.
5.	oft in den Spiegel schauen	to often look into the mirror
6.	immer so laut lachen	to always laugh so loudly
7.	laut und freundlich miteinander sprechen	to talk in a loud and friendly manner with one another

C. THE WAY FOR YOU TO GET THERE

1) Study the expressions in the left-hand column of Section B while you listen to them on the taped models (use recordings on shelf 1 marked "Kernstufe/Lesson 9B"). Practice saying the expressions along with the tape until you can easily produce them when you cover the left-hand column.

2) Read the explanations and examples in section D until you think you understand them. If several readings do not make things clear, consult the teacher.

3) Practice as directed in section E. You may use the printed guide in section E and the tape at the same time to start with, but don't consider yourself finished until you can form oral and written sentences from the cues in the left-hand column a) using only the tapes as cues, and b) using only the printed text as cues.

D. THE WAY A GERMAN PUTS IT TOGETHER

An extremely important fact about German structure should be learned early. This concerns the "home base" position of the German verb. Getting the feel of this position, as you will gradually see in future lessons, is one of the keys to acquiring German SprachgefÜhl (a feeling for the language), since this position is one of the unique things about German--and one that contrasts sharply with English.

Examples in English--

Person Performing Action (Subject)	What's Being Done (Action in Infinitive Form)	Stated as Sentence
(Hans)	(to go alone)	Hans is going alone.
(we)	(to live in Berlin)	We live in Berlin.
(you)	(to have a family)	You have a family.

Examples in German--

(Hans)	(allein gehen)	Hans geht allein.
(wir)	(in Berlin wohnen)	Wir wohnen in Berlin.
(du)	(eine Familie haben)	Du hast eine Familie.

E. YOU PUT IT TOGETHER

What are the German equivalents of the following English expressions?

1. to find the world strange	die Welt fremd finden
2. to cry sadly	traurig weinen
3. to come alone	allein kommen
4. to ask many people	viele Leute fragen
5. to dream now and then	ab und zu träumen
6. to go into my room	in mein Zimmer gehen

(Cover up the right-hand column. Use it as the "key" when you have to. Be sure to use the recordings marked for this lesson and section.)

Now cover up the right-hand column and see if you can put the following subjects and activities together into correct German sentences. (Use the recorded versions, "Kernstufe/Lesson 9E," to assure correct pronunciation and intonation!)

(ich) (in Deutschland wohnen)	Ich wohne in Deutschland.
(wir) (die Welt schön finden)	Wir finden die Welt schön.
(du) (die Strasse kennen)	Du kennst die Strasse.
(er) (manchmal allein gehen)	Er geht manchmal allein.
(die Familie) (oft laut lachen)	Die Familie lacht oft laut.
(die Leute) (immer so lange sprechen)	Die Leute sprechen immer so lange.
(ihr) (dann in das Zimmer gehen)	Ihr geht dann in das Zimmer.
(sie) (pl.) (manchmal miteinander weinen)	Sie weinen manchmal miteinander.
(sie) (sing.) (viel und laut lachen)	Sie lacht viel und laut.

F. HOW WELL CAN YOU DO IT NOW?

Check section A, test yourself on this basis, and if you can carry out the objectives quickly, report to the teacher for final evaluation. You will be asked to do exactly what is called for in section A.

In designing self-teaching units, especially those of a remedial nature, it is desirable to consider the individual student's learning preference. Some students learn best through tapes and cassettes, whereas others are strongly visually oriented. Some learn most efficiently through analysis of structure and pattern; others learn more easily from the direct-method approach.

Choosing an advantageous learning medium for each student does not necessarily entail the creation of separate units in each medium for each topic. The four major modes mentioned above may be combined in various ways within a single unit. Thus, in an ideal situation, the audio-oriented student could first become acquainted with the materials in Section B of the unit through recordings and then proceed to the printed form (if included in the unit) when he has grasped the audio version. The visually oriented student would be directed to do just the opposite. The analysis-prone student might study Section D first; the direct-method student could largely ignore Section D. The real difficulty lies in identifying the student's best learning path. Here a subjective evaluation by the teacher based on observation and interpretation of the student's performance and preferences is usually the only recourse.

Creating post-tests for self-teaching units will not be difficult if the objectives and the unit have been well constructed. Some teachers prefer to prepare separate tests to measure the attainment of the stated objectives. Others use the material and drills in sections B and E as the "test." In either case, the performance objective serves as the exact guide to the test items. However, such a procedure may not always be appropriate, especially if the unit is designed to teach the student to use a pattern in a different situation and with different words from those being practiced.

The evaluation procedure should always measure the performance specified in the initial objectives. The resultant high grades should please educators, if their objective is real mastery of the subject by each student. However, the game which many educators play, that of using tests to trap students, to measure

intellectual agility, or to sift students into a grading curve, has a long tradition. This does not promote maximum learning of the foreign language by a maximum number of students.

Conclusion

This paper should not be interpreted as a recommendation or plea that learning packets or programmed instruction constitute an entire foreign language curriculum. Such materials can form the core of a foreign language program (and have done so in many schools across the United States), but other activities have also proven necessary. Students want to interact and use their skills in situations of real give-and-take communication. They also want or need to work as a group--large or small. They enjoy community, and they enjoy group fun. The program that neglects these dimensions (whether "packaged" or not) has missed the essence of human language.

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For more extensive research the ACTFL Annual Bibliography in Foreign Language Annals (May 1972 and 1973) is recommended. See especially the sections on curriculum problems and development, methods, and testing.

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